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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/RD/SCA, DS/DSS/ITA AND SA/INS

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TAGS: ASEC CASC PTER
SUBJECT: EMBASSY COLOMBO EAC MEETING 07/23/2008

Classified By: Michael V. Perkins, Regional Security Officer,
reasons 1.4 (b, c)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: AmEmbassy Colombo convened an Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting on July 23, 2008. The EAC discussed post's security posture in light of the upcoming South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) conference, hosted by the Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) in Colombo from July 27 - August 3, 2008. The EAC discussed threat information, arrangements for USG employees' access to the Chancery and American Center, emergency notification procedures, and notifications to the expatriate American citizen (Amcit) community. The EAC also discussed amendments of the restricted travel policy for official travel to Trincomalee. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On July 23, 2008, AmEmbassy Colombo convened an EAC meeting. Present for the meeting were the Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, Regional Security Officer, Political Officer, Economic Officer, Regional Affairs Officer, Information Programs Officer, Defense Attach, Office of Defense Cooperation, Medical Officer, Management Officer, MSG Acting Detachment Commander, USAID Acting Director, International Broadcasting Bureau Acting Director, Consular Officer, and Public Affairs Officer. The agenda items for the meeting were:

¶A. Post's security posture vis-a-vis the upcoming SAARC conference in Colombo

¶B. Threats, if any, posed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) to the SAARC conference, USG employees or the expatriate American community

¶C. Embassy personnel and GSL contacts' assessment of the declared LTTE unilateral ceasefire during the conference

¶D. Access procedures for USG employees into the High Security Zones, one of which contains both the Chancery and the American Center

¶E. Notifying the USG and Amcit community of potential problems for movement in Colombo and vicinity during the SAARC conference

¶F. Amending post's Restricted Travel policy for official travel to Trincomalee in the Eastern Province

Threats to SAARC Conference

¶13. (SBU) RSO, RAO, POL and DATT informed the EAC that their various contacts had no information regarding a specific threat that any group, but especially the LTTE, may pose for the SAARC conference. The Sri Lanka Police Service (SLPS) had arrested a suspected "Black Tiger" (suicide cadre) within the past few weeks, and the detainee claimed that several more

Black Tigers were in Colombo with orders to conduct attacks. As a result of that information, and speculating that the Black Tigers would conduct attacks to disrupt the SAARC conference, the Police Service conducted large scale sweep operations in majority Tamil populated communities of Colombo. The SLPS had not been able to locate other alleged Black Tigers and no attacks have occurred in Colombo for several weeks. RSO's contacts conjectured that the LTTE may still target military or political figures, regardless of the announced ceasefire. However, in general, no Embassy contacts within the GSL had credible threat information and most of their comments were conjecture based on past experience.

LTTE Unilateral Ceasefire Announcement

14. (S/NF) Various GSL sources lent little, if any, credibility to the LTTE's ceasefire declaration. Some sources speculated that the LTTE declared the ceasefire in order to gain international support while the GSL is hosting a major international event. Other sources commented that the LTTE had successfully launched attacks on "hard targets" during previous unilateral ceasefire declarations and speculated that the LTTE would not hesitate to attack GSL targets, despite the declaration, if the opportunity arises. POL averred that LTTE might try to conduct an attack prior to July 27 (the date on which its declared ceasefire takes effect) but not during the SAARC conference. GRPO informed the EAC that GSL intelligence services had communications intercepts from some LTTE leaders in the Wanni (LTTE-controlled area in the Northern Province) to their operatives in Colombo, in which the Wanni leaders ordered the Colombo operatives to stand down during the SAARC conference. However, GSL intelligence services were not sure if all LTTE operatives in Colombo had the same orders. Therefore, the possibility of attacks still existed. The EAC concurred that the targets would still be GSL military, police, or political figures, and not foreign delegations attending SAARC or the actual SAARC venue.

Post and Amcit Security Posture

15. (SBU) The EAC concurred that the threat to Embassy personnel and the expatriate Amcit community remains being in the wrong place at the wrong time - that is, in the proximity of an attack on a GSL political or military target - rather than being the specific target of an LTTE attack. CONS recommended, and the EAC concurred, that the threat information contained in post's current Travel Warning, Country Specific Information Sheet and Warden message was sufficient for the actual threat situation and therefore did not warrant amendment.

Access to USG Facilities

16. (SBU) The GSL has established several "High Security Zones" (HSZ) throughout Colombo. Within these HSZs (one of which contains both the U.S. Embassy and the American Center), police and military personnel will severely restrict, or in some cases completely prohibit, vehicle or pedestrian traffic. Outside of these HSZs, police will intermittently obstruct traffic for VIP motorcade movements, creating gridlock on the roads between USG facilities and employees' residences. RSO's Foreign Service National Investigator (FSNI) consulted with senior SLPS officials regarding access to USG facilities during the conference, and specifically during the period of heightened security and highly restricted traffic flow (July 31 to August 3). RSO FSNI negotiated an arrangement with the Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of the Colombo police jurisdiction whereby Mission personnel may use their Embassy ID cards as "permits" for the purpose of passing through the various police checks leading to the Embassy and the American Center. (RSO note -

the DIG flatly refused to issue permits for all Embassy American and FSN staff, citing logistical difficulties). The DIG requested that RSO provide a list of employees' names and their vehicles to the SLPS. He promised to distribute the list to police officers staffing the various checkpoints close to the HSZ containing the USG facilities. However, the DIG noted that the officers under his control were but a fraction of the 12,500 police who will be in Colombo for the SAARC conference and warned that Embassy personnel may experience delays or even denial of access, despite the DIG's best efforts. The DIG said that visa applicants or American citizens seeking Consular services would be able to access the Embassy, if they showed appropriate paperwork and ID documents at checkpoints near the Embassy.

¶7. (SBU) The EAC recommended the following measures regarding access to the HSZs:

-- Embassy personnel (American and local nationals) must carry their Mission IDs to show to police staffing the checkpoints.

-- American citizen personnel should carry their Embassy-issued radios during the SAARC conference, in order to receive instant notifications (vice phone calls or text messages) of developing situations.

-- The Embassy will test the phone tree system prior to the SAARC conference.

-- If required, post will run shuttles from the EMR to the Chancery and American Center. If employees experience difficulties or cannot gain access to the HSZ, they may park at the EMR and take a shuttle.

-- If all else fails and employees are unable to reach the Chancery, they may take "liberal leave."

-- The Consular Section will issue a Warden message regarding the security measures in place during the conference and the potential for problems related to the event.

-- The Management Officer will issue a Management Notice to the Embassy community regarding the above measures.

Restricted Travel to Trincomalee

¶8. (SBU) Regarding travel to Trincomalee, the RSO informed the EAC that he had recommended that the Ambassador consider amending the restricted travel policy. Currently, USG personnel may not travel to Trincomalee (located in the Eastern Province, a formerly LTTE-occupied territory) for personal trips. Personnel may travel there for official purposes only after the RSO has vetted, and the DCM has approved, a travel request. The RSO traveled to Trincomalee recently to consult with police and military sources and to re-assess the security situation. Senior officials with whom the RSO consulted averred that the LTTE had not conducted any major attacks in almost two years, nor had any groups of LTTE crossed the A-6 Highway (main Northeast/Southwest artery) for two years. Bunkers are located along the A-6, in some places only 100 meters apart, thus highway banditry is virtually nil. Crime against Westerners is almost nonexistent, according to the DIG in charge of Trincomalee, who further advised that the hotels and lodges in the Uppaveli and Nilaveli areas are safe for foreigners. The RSO observed townspeople moving about freely at night, and seemingly with little worries for their safety. Therefore, the RSO recommended, and the Ambassador approved, the following revisions of the restricted travel policy, about which the RSO will issue a Security Notice:

-- USG personnel may travel to Trincomalee town (not the entire district) for official purposes only, without seeking RSO and DCM approval. However, they must still file a trip itinerary with the RSO and their respective supervisors.

-- Travel within Trincomalee town is restricted to the area as far north as Nilaveli and as far south as China Bay.

-- Personnel may lodge in hotels in Nilaveli and Uppaveli (outside of "downtown" Trincomalee), as well as in Trincomalee town.

-- Personnel should exercise caution if traveling to the market area in downtown Trincomalee at night.

-- The route to Trincomalee is restricted to the A-6 Highway and only daytime travel between Colombo and Trincomalee is authorized.

-- USG personnel still may not take personal trips to Trincomalee.

¶9. (U) Post will continue to monitor the security environment and report further developments, if any, septel. POC for this message is RSO Michael V. Perkins, who may be contacted at 94.11.249.8885, 94.11.249.8888 (MSG Post 1 after regular business hours), or via the classified and unclassified email systems.

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